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SUBJECT: RWANDA URGES REFUGEES IN UGANDA TO RETURN HOME

Classified By: Ambassador W. Stuart Symington, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Approximately 15,000 Rwandan refugees remain in Uganda, despite Rwandan, Ugandan and UNHCR agreement that they should return to Rwanda by August 31. Most of these fled Rwanda after the 1994 genocide, although some have been in Uganda for decades. They are located both in camps and dispersed in local communities. Some refugees have cited fear of persecution and scarcity of land as reasons for remaining in Uganda. Local UNHCR officials have not found a pattern of persecution in Rwanda, but land is indeed scarce. The GOR, eager to normalize and to shed its image as a war-torn country, is considering invoking the 1951 Refugee Convention's "cessation clause" that would end refugee status for all Rwandan refugees worldwide as of December 31. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) Earlier this year, the Governments of Rwanda (GOR), Uganda (GOU) and the UNHCR, noting Rwanda's stability and willingness to accept returnees, agreed that all of the approximately 20,000 Rwandan refugees in Uganda must return to Rwanda by July 31. By that date, however, only an estimated 5,385 had done so, prompting the GOR, GOU, and UNHCR to extend the deadline to August 31. Per UNHCR, as of August 13, only an additional 28 refugees had returned to Rwanda. In response, the GOR has publicly acknowledged that they are considering implementing the "cessation clause," of the 1951 Refugee Convention, and ending refugee status for all Rwandan refugees, effective December 31, 2009. (Note: Although the GOR has formal authority to apply the cessation clause, the Executive Committee of the UNHCR (Excom) Conclusion 69, which dates from 1992, stipulates that the "High Commissioner should be appropriately involved" and stresses that States should make use of country of origin information, "particularly" from UNHCR. End Note.) The UNHCR Excom will discuss this issue in October at its next meeting.

13. (U) The GOR, GOU and UNHCR discussed these issues at the August 6 tripartite meeting and share the view that there is no justification for Rwandan refugees to remain in Uganda, because Rwanda is stable and willing to take them back. UNHCR and the GOU also cite the financial burden as an additional reason to repatriate Rwandans. UNHCR provides returnees with non-food items such as blankets and jerrycans, while WFP provides them with three-month food rations. According to Kigali-based UNHCR officials, these refugees--most of whom are ethnic Hutus who fled Rwanda after the 1994 genocide ended--have cited fear of persecution, lack of available farmland, lack of freedom of expression, and fear of possible genocide-related criminal charges. Many are prospering as farmers in Uganda, where land is plentiful, and are well aware that land is scarce in Rwanda. UNHCR monitoring has determined that difficult living and economic conditions, rather than persecution, are the most serious

challenges facing returnees.

14. (C) COMMENT: Rwanda, Uganda, and UNHCR have all agreed that Rwandan refugees should return to Rwanda. Rwandan officials are keen for their country--as it courts international investment and seeks a stronger leadership role in the region--to shed its image as a post-conflict state. Also, the current GOR is itself the direct descendant of a QAlso, the current GOR is itself the direct descendant of a refugee-based insurgency, and is well aware of the potential for diaspora and refugee populations to harbor or evolve into threats. The reluctance of Hutu refugees in Uganda to return to Rwanda may reflect some individuals' fears of facing genocide charges, or simply opposition to living under the current government. However, it is likely, given the relatively abundant land in Uganda, that many hesitate to return for economic reasons. END COMMENT.
SYMINGTON